

FIRST-HAND ACCOUNTS FROM WESTERNERS WHO DEFECTED FROM
ISIS:
RECRUITMENT, ALLEGIANCE, DEFECTION

by
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Abstract

Jihadist terrorist organization Islamic State (ISIS) has demonstrated a formidable ability to recruit Western civilians as future members. Although prior studies have investigated ISIS' recruitment techniques targeting Americans and Europeans, much of this research has been limited in inquiry and scope. This study seeks to offer a more comprehensive review through eyewitness accounts from ISIS defectors now residing in the West.

This research study aims to assist counterterrorism personnel in combatting ISIS recruitment, help Westerners recognize family and peers that may be in jeopardy of radicalization, offer lessons to Westerners who may be contemplating membership in jihadist organizations, and educate American society on how to defeat terrorist marketing in the West.

Ultimately, the data accumulated through third-party interviews with Western jihadist recruits only partially confirmed the hypothesis above. While the data sufficiently identified the catalysts for ISIS membership and provided clear warnings for future sympathizers, it only offered general guidance to counterterrorist personnel and the greater public. The fact that the hypothesis was hence only somewhat realized signifies the need for greater research of Western recruits.

Advisors and Readers

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Readers: Dr. Joana Cook and Dr. Elena Mastors.

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Introduction

After 9/11, radical jihadism engrossed the fears of the American public while baffling both the U.S. government and counterterrorism experts alike. While radical Islamic terrorist groups such as the Taliban and Al-Qaeda had successfully provoked terror on U.S. soil in the past, no threat since 9/11 has plagued the American conscious like the ascendance of ISIS. Although ISIS has recently been subject to multiple military defeats and continues to surrender land in the Middle East, the organization's ability to advertise, recruit, and eventually radicalize Western civilians confirms their subsisting threat. Lest the government underestimate another terrorist group and allow an attack that could have been prevented, the existing danger posed by ISIS should not be underestimated.

As demonstrated by numerous studies and cases involving Western recruits, U.S. counterterrorism authorities have so far been out-strategized in the "war of ideas" against ISIS recruiting. The wide-ranging breadth of ISIS recruiting grounds – from social media to mosques – has permitted ISIS to efficiently evade surveillance and propagate its jihadist message. Although its raw number of Western recruits is modest, recent events prove the utmost threat posed by even this faction of new members. It must not continue to grow.

As one might expect, the success and survival of any jihadist organization is predicated upon its capacity to entice new recruits into its ranks. Unfortunately, there exists a lack of comprehensive primary research devoted to ISIS recruitment of Westerners. The need to fill this void in the literature cannot be overemphasized:

Eyewitness accounts into recruiting strategies offers the greatest insight into the epicenter of ISIS' survival. Until this point, a necessary first-hand Western perspective has been somewhat neglected by researchers. Although existing scholarship does analyze individual interviews conducted with one defector, there are few studies that systemically compare multiple interviews in an all-inclusive analysis.

By exploring beyond anecdotal insight, this research study seeks to unearth ISIS recruitment schemes by exploring interviews of multiple Western (American and European) citizens who initially joined ISIS, but have since renounced their allegiance and are presently regarded as "defectors." The intention of this study is to identify defectors who can offer priceless perspectives that may allow us to answer the following questions: Why are particular individuals vulnerable to jihadist marketing, what techniques does ISIS use in order to entice recruits, and how do U.S. counterterrorism authorities best combat these methods of recruitment?

The data gathered in this research can help support the counter-recruitment crusade in an unmatched way. Namely, it may assist future researchers in identifying themes of terrorist marketing, permit legislators to pinpoint new or reconsider current laws that counteract jihadist propaganda, and, maybe most important, can succor counterterrorism and law enforcement agencies in detecting vulnerable Americans and rebuffing recruitment schemes. In its entirety, this study has the potential to both satisfy the gap in extensive "homegrown" terrorist recruitment literature while simultaneously assisting personnel in the FBI and CIA

in a battle to win the “war of ideas” and protect national security and Western citizens.

Literature Review

A considerable deal of previous research offers a framework for this study. The development of jihadist sympathy, jihadist marketing strategies, radicalization process, and final disenchantment with terrorist groups has been well recorded by both researchers and counterterrorism experts. In reality, this study was originally encouraged by Speckhard and Yayla’s research. In interviews with ISIS defectors now living in Turkey, they infiltrated the ruthless, “powerful, horrific, and well-funded” underworld of jihadism, and supply an extraordinarily exclusive first-hand perspective into the organization. The author of this research has not yet read any study that even approaches the degree of insight that their study provides concerning the manipulative, religiously / politically propagandized, and cunningly deceptive schemes used by jihadist recruiters.¹

Although their research helped design this study, the differences between radicalization in the West and the Middle East are marked to the point that Speckhard and Yayla’s research has restricted applicability to an exploration of Western jihadism. Yet astonishingly, their research has not been replicated to the

1. Speckhard, Anne and Yayla, Ahmet S. “Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State: Why They Joined, What They Saw, Why They Quit,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 9, Issue 6, December 2015, pp. 95-116.

same depth in the West, and thus this study hopes to highlight this gap in Western recruitment research.

It should be noted that any disagreements in the literature are largely due to the discovery of new evidence rather than staunchly competing views. Traditionally, most recruits fit the profile of young, poor, Muslim, uneducated, and vulnerable civilians in search of meaning. New theories propose a variance in demographics, extending to older Western recruits from diverse backgrounds.

Origins of Terrorist Sympathy

Previous research proposes that, perhaps unexpectedly, there is no “typical profile” of Western jihadist recruits. Although traditional classifications of terrorists (such as “lone wolf” types) usually conform to particular demographics (such as lower education levels), numerous studies regarding homegrown jihadist sympathizers suggest great variances in the makeup of recruits: Extensive deviations among ethnicity, gender, age, education levels, socioeconomic status, etc. indicate that there exists no uniform portrait of a Western jihadist sympathizer.² The only demographic traits that proved comparatively consistent are: (1) Allegiance to Islam (or in reality, their wildly contorted version of it), and (2) immigrant status (typically second or third generation).³ As leading counterterrorism expert, Bruce Hoffman, asserts, “ISIS deliberately takes a diversified approach in its recruiting efforts. ISIS attracts and accepts devout

² Napolitano, Janet; Secretary of Homeland Security (2010-09-22). "Nine Years After 9/11: Confronting the Terrorist Threat to the Homeland". Testimony before Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2010/09/22/statement-secretary-janet-napolitano-united-states-senate-committee-homeland>

³ Williams, Heather J; Chandler, Nathan; Robinson, Eric. “Trends in the Draw of Americans to Foreign Terrorist Organizations from 9/11 to Today.” *Rand Corporation*. 2018.

Muslims but it also actively recruits recent converts, opportunists, profiteers, sadists and thrill-seekers—essentially anyone who can contribute to the cause.”⁴

The previous literature suggests that the origins of terrorist sympathy may emanate from a variety of sources, especially the web (including social media and the dark web), religious institutions such as mosques, and even more clustered factions of society like prison.⁵ As prior research will soon demonstrate, most recruiting is conducted through the internet. Yet, no matter how their sympathy originally developed, recruitment literature asserts that the bulk of recruits engage a “four stage” process that leaves them uniquely susceptible to jihadist propaganda.

This progression is best elucidated by Dr. Borum in his work, “Understanding the Terrorist Mind-Set.” Though he concedes that there is “no universal method” for evaluating the sequence of extremism, he claims that a process is framed by “four observable stages.” In brief, vulnerable sympathizers typically: (1) Pinpoint “some type of undesirable event or condition” (such as a disillusionment with American society), (2) they “frame the undesirable condition as an ‘injustice’” (they believe that they have been personally cheated by this injustice), (3) they identify “a person or group responsible” for the injustice (like the U.S. government), and (4) they “deem the person or group responsible...as ‘bad’” (justifying the terrorism that will be committed against the responsible party).⁶

⁴ Weinman, Edward, Hoffman, Bruce, “Inside ISIS,” *Connecticut College*, 2016, <https://www.conncoll.edu/news/cc-magazine/past-issues/2016-issues/fall-2016/inside-isis/>

⁵ Weimann, Gabriel. “Terrorist Migration to the Dark Web,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*. Vol. 10, Issue 3, 2016, pp. 40-43.

⁶ Borum, Randy. “Understanding the Terrorist Mind-Set,” *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, July, 2003, pp. 7-10, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/201462.pdf>

Recruitment Strategies

As stated earlier, the internet allows for wide-ranging and unrestricted access to recruits. While offering limitless communication, the internet apparently “normalizes” recruiting, as most sympathizers are well acquainted and even socially attracted to the web. Though terrorist advertising previously held a considerable presence on social media, it has since transferred to the dark web due to censorship by companies such as Facebook and Twitter.⁷ A plethora of research has established that recruitment usually begins as unplanned sympathy for a terrorist cause, but subsequently deepens as the sympathizer networks with fellow sympathizers and jihadists themselves. Not unlike a cult, it “is a means of social networking for like-minded extremists...including those who are not yet radicalized, but who may become so through the anonymity of cyberspace.”⁸

Online recruiting has evolved to the point at which jihadists tailor their approach to each individual sympathizer. Propagandized recruitment videos may demonstrate the cultural attraction of being “jihad cool” so as to entice juvenile recruits. Meanwhile, theologically driven chatrooms may examine the connection between Islam and jihadism for older, better educated sympathizers.⁹ While American counterterrorism personnel is allowed to conduct surveillance on the web (unlike Mosques, which are granted protection from government censoring), the

⁷ Mueller, Robert S. III; Director of the FBI (2010-10-06). “Countering the Terrorism Threat”. *Speech at Preparedness Group Conference*, <https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/news/speeches/countering-the-terrorism-threat>

⁸ Weimann, Gabriel. “Terrorist Migration to Social Media,” *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2015, pp. 180-187.

⁹ Picart, Caroline Joan S. “Jihad Cool/Jihad Chic”: The Roles of the Internet and Imagined Relations in the Self-Radicalization of Colleen LaRose (Jihad Jane). *Societies*. 2015

undetectable, anonymous, and continuously expanding nature of the internet presents an incredible challenge to the employment of counterterrorism.¹⁰

Radicalization Process

As mentioned beforehand, Speckhard and Yayla's research was confined to defectors residing in Turkey. Nevertheless, they established a few themes that similarly resonate with American recruits. Engrossment in the "brand" of ISIS, supplying of religious instruction to socially isolated Muslims, opportunities for marriage and reliable employment, the capacity to reach "martyrdom," and immersion in anti-American propaganda has permitted for a relentless cycle of new members. These marketing methods help fortify the roots of sympathy and supply a direct route to dangerous radicalization.¹¹

Experts have even classified new recruits into the following categories: Status seekers (seeking "social standing" within a respected organization), identity seekers (isolated individuals craving belonging), revenge seekers (those seeking retribution against perceived injustice), redemption seekers (martyrdom as penitence for previous sins), responsibility seekers (in search of marriage, job security, etc.), thrill seekers (those desiring a "warrior" lifestyle – a component of "jihad cool"), ideology seekers (radical Islamic fundamentalists), justice seekers

¹⁰ Younas, Muhammad Ahsan. "'Digital Jihad' and its Significance to Counterterrorism," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis*. Vol. 6, No. 2, 2014, pp. 10-17

¹¹ Speckhard, Anne and Yayla, Ahmet S. "Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State: Why They Joined, What They Saw, Why They Quit," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 9, Issue 6, December 2015, pp. 95-116.

(those who want to hold enemies, like the U.S., accountable), and death seekers (martyrdom as an honorable alternative to suicide).¹²

Disenchantment and Defection

Though confined to defectors residing in Turkey, Speckhard and Yayla postulate that a clear “mismatch between the words and deeds of IS” eventually disillusioned even the most indoctrinated recruits. Although the defectors in this research are not Middle Eastern, they nevertheless may perceive the obvious hypocrisy of ISIS’ “religious instruction” considering the rape and murder of its own members. Supplemented by ensuing recognition of the barbarity of Sharia law and the persistent moral, tactical, and political shortcomings of ISIS, it will be fascinating to determine if Western recruits were equally disheartened by these themes.¹³

A key impediment to defection is found in the “confused state of ‘true believes’ and their difficult of leaving a group once” they have devoted themselves to the “sacred values” of the jihadist organization. This loyalty to ISIS philosophy is almost unwavering despite blatant evidence that disputes their earlier teachings.¹⁴ In view of this dogged fidelity to ISIS, Neumann identifies four themes that may encourage recruits to defect, even if they maintain radicalized views. Primarily, relentless fighting with “other Sunni rebel groups” inspired numerous members to reconsider their pledge to ISIS’ supposed mission. Second, the brutality rendered on

¹² Tucker, Patrick. "Why Join ISIS? How Fighters Respond When You Ask Them". *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/12/why-people-join-isis/419685/>

¹³ Speckhard, Anne and Yayla, Ahmet S. “Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State: Why They Joined, What They Saw, Why They Quit,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 9, Issue 6, December 2015, pp. 95-116.

¹⁴ Altran, Scott and Axelrod, Robert, “In theory: Reframing sacred values,” *Negotiation Journal*, July, 2008, <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~axe/negj0708.pdf>

ISIS' own recruits disillusioned countless member who saw this cruelty as hypocritical in comparison to their prior theological teachings. Third, mounting levels of corruption enraged seasoned recruits who recognized the injustice as inexcusable. Last, disheartening tales of ISIS fighters being slaughtered in military defeats, combined with the declining welfare of members began to expose ISIS' original message as a complete sham.¹⁵

Remaining Gaps in the Literature

Although impressive, there exists few comprehensive eyewitness interviews of multiple Western defectors. It is possible that the strategies used by Western counter-terrorism authorities have limited effects upon deterring recruitment because they are either: (1) Misapplying the lessons drawn from Middle Eastern defectors, and / or (2) they are erroneously applying their knowledge of Middle Eastern recruits to Westerners. Current attempts at deterrence demand a greater body of research predicated upon actual first-hand accounts provided by defectors from North America and Europe. While insightful, research like that conducted by Speckhard and Yayla has limited ability to assist in specifically combatting recruitment of Western civilians.

¹⁵ Neumann, Peter, "Victims, perpetrators, assets: the narratives of Islamic State defectors," *ICSR Report*, 2015, <https://socialutveckling.goteborg.se/uploads/ICSR-Report-Victims-Perpertrators-Assets-The-Narratives-of-Islamic-State-Defectors.pdf>

Hypothesis & Methods

Due to the obvious fact that the author of this research lacks the resources to locate and physically interview Western defectors, this study is based on interviews conducted by other sources, namely journalists. These sources range from hard transcripts of interviews, to recorded videos of interviews, to analysis that includes quotes provided by defectors in interviews. Despite the fact that previous research has pinpointed a myriad of themes that are predicted to emerge during the interviews and will guide the formulation of relevant questions, the nucleus of this analysis will derive from the answers given by each defector.

Naturally, the semi-structured interview format offered below does not represent the questions verbatim asked by the interviewers. Rather, in consultation with the prior literature, the questions presented are those that the author of this study believes best reveals the motivations of recruits, rationale behind their defection, and lessons that can be offered to future jihadist sympathizers. In other words, if equipped with the resources to interview defectors themselves, these are some of the questions that this author would include in semi-structured interviews with each defector. In this study, however, the answers to each question was identified within the transcript or video of the defector's responses. Thus, it should be noted that these are not direct responses to the answers proposed below (a limitation of this study that will be discussed later). It should also be noted that the author of this study would have asked many additional questions, including probing questions, if offered the ability to interview these defectors in person (again, a limitation of this study that will be examined).

It is predicted that, by evaluating the answers given by defectors in this study, this research will uncover why Western defectors initially sympathized with ISIS, what permitted these recruits to be so vulnerable to terrorist agitprop, what techniques were employed to attract and indoctrinate them into the jihadist ranks, why they eventually denounced their membership, what lessons they can offer to future sympathizers, and how U.S. counterterrorism, and the general public, can win the “war of ideas.” In accordance with the literature, it is expected that recruits were initially inspired by a disillusionment with American society that was manipulated into hate and a desire for revenge by web-based jihadist propaganda. Their radicalization is predicted to have been individually tailored (corresponding to the “seeker” classifications) to each recruit. This study then expects that, after witnessing the brutality and hypocrisy of ISIS leaders, they became quickly disenchanted with the group, and can now offer lessons to would-be sympathizers and explicit guidance to government authorities and the public in the battle to beat ISIS recruitment.

Data

Defectors Interviewed:

1. Mo (real name remains undisclosed) interviewed by *NBC News*.
2. Hoda Muthana interviewed by the *New York Times*, *ABC News*, and the *Guardian*.
3. Kimberly Gwen Polman interviewed by the *New York Times*.
4. Warren Christopher Clark interviewed by *NBC News* and also offered testimony in court.
5. Muhammad Ali interviewed by *Global News*.
6. Harry Sarfo interviewed by the *New York Times* and *The Independent*.

Protocol Questions

General Background / Demographic Questions

1. How old are you?

Mo: 27 years old.¹⁶

Muthana: 24 years old.¹⁷

Polman: 46 years old.¹⁸

Clark: 34 years old.¹⁹

¹⁶ Engel, Richard, Plessner, Ben, Connor, Tracy, “American ISIS Defector: ‘I’ve Let My Nation Down,’” *NBC News*, Retrieved 10/9/19, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-uncovered/american-isis-defector-i-ve-let-my-nation-down-n578216>

¹⁷ Callimachi, Rukmini, Yuhas, Alan, “Alabama Woman Who Joined ISIS Can’t Return Home, U.S. Says,” *The New York Times*, February 20, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/20/world/middleeast/isis-bride-hoda-muthana.html>,

¹⁸ Callimachi, Rukmini, Yuhas, Alan, “Alabama Woman Who Joined ISIS Can’t Return Home, U.S. Says,” *The New York Times*, February 20, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/20/world/middleeast/isis-bride-hoda-muthana.html>,

¹⁹ Engel, Richard, “American ISIS member Warren Clark says he wanted to see ‘what the group was about,’” *NBC News*, Retrieved October 9, 2019,

Ali: 28 years old.²⁰

Sarfo: Precise age is unknown, but his appearance suggests that he is in his mid-thirties.

2. What is your gender and nationality?

Mo: Male – American.²¹

Muthana: Female – American.²²

Polman: Female – Canadian - American.

Clark: Male – American.

Ali: Male – Canadian.

Sarfo: Male – German.

3. What is the highest level of education that you have obtained?

Mo: Withdrew from Columbia University.

Muthana: Withdrew from the University of Alabama at Birmingham.²³

Polman: Studied legal administration at Douglas College.

Clark: Withdrew from the University of Houston.²⁴

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/american-isis-member-detained-syria-says-he-wanted-go-see-n958711>

²⁰ Bell, Stewart, “Exclusive: Extended interview with captured Canadian ISIS Fighter,” *Global News*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gZin02WoG4>

²¹ Engel, Richard, Plesser, Ben, Connor, Tracy, “American ISIS Defector: ‘I’ve Let My Nation Down,’” *NBC News*, Retrieved 10/9/19, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-uncovered/american-isis-defector-i-ve-let-my-nation-down-n578216>

²² Callimachi, Rukmini, Yuhas, Alan, “Alabama Woman Who Joined ISIS Can’t Return Home, U.S. Says,” *The New York Times*, February 20, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/20/world/middleeast/isis-bride-hoda-muthana.html>,

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Engel, Richard, “American ISIS member Warren Clark says he wanted to see 'what the group was about,’” *NBC News*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/american-isis-member-detained-syria-says-he-wanted-go-see-n958711>

Ali: Withdrew from an undisclosed university. Ali stated that he was “just lost, just out of it” while in college.²⁵

Sarfo: Attended three separate colleges - graduation status is unknown.²⁶

4. What was your job or position prior to joining ISIS?

Mo: Taxi driver.

Muthana: College student.²⁷

Polman: Teacher at a Muslim school.²⁸

Clark: Substitute teacher.²⁹

Ali: Worked in the oil industry in Canada.³⁰

Sarfo: Postman for a delivery service.³¹

5. Do you identify with a religion prior to considering membership in ISIS?

²⁵ Bell, Stewart, “Exclusive: Extended interview with captured Canadian ISIS Fighter,” *Global News*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gZin02WoG4>

²⁶ Dearden, Lizzie, “Former Isis militant who grew up in the UK says coalition bombing campaign will drive more jihadists to launch attacks,” *The Independent*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/former-isis-militant-harry-sarfo-who-grew-up-in-the-uk-says-coalition-bombing-campaign-will-drive-a6982696.html>

²⁷ Callimachi, Rukmini, Yuhas, Alan, “Alabama Woman Who Joined ISIS Can’t Return Home, U.S. Says,” *The New York Times*, February 20, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/20/world/middleeast/isis-bride-hoda-muthana.html>,

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Engel, Richard, “American ISIS member Warren Clark says he wanted to see ‘what the group was about,’” *NBC News*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/american-isis-member-detained-syria-says-he-wanted-go-see-n958711>

³⁰ Bell, Stewart, “Exclusive: Extended interview with captured Canadian ISIS Fighter,” *Global News*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gZin02WoG4>

³¹ Dearden, Lizzie, “Former Isis militant who grew up in the UK says coalition bombing campaign will drive more jihadists to launch attacks,” *The Independent*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/former-isis-militant-harry-sarfo-who-grew-up-in-the-uk-says-coalition-bombing-campaign-will-drive-a6982696.html>

Mo: Considered himself a “passive Muslim” prior to joining ISIS, as he grew up in a moderately religious household. Although his parents were Muslim, they were not strict in their employment of religion.³²

Muthana: Raised in a strict Islamic household, her social life was severely limited. Her first bona fide introduction to the “outside world” came in the form of a cellphone she was gifted at graduation.³³

Ali: Attended Catholic school as a child, although he later converted to Islam.³⁴

The other participants were not asked or did not offer a specific answer to this question. The inability to obtain responses to each question by every defector is a limitation of this study that will be discussed later.

Origins of Sympathy for ISIS

6. How did you first hear about ISIS?

Mo: Watched the controversial Dutch film, “Submission,” in a college class and began researching Islam online. His frustration with the political situation of Muslims both abroad and in the U.S. led him to increasingly interact with jihadist sympathizers and recruiters in online chatrooms.³⁵

Clark: Became a member of a “jihadist fan club” on YouTube after reading their social media accounts.

³² Engel, Richard, Plessner, Ben, Connor, Tracy, “American ISIS Defector: ‘I’ve Let My Nation Down,’” *NBC News*, Retrieved 10/9/19, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-uncovered/american-isis-defector-i-ve-let-my-nation-down-n578216>

³³ Callimachi, Rukmini, Yuhas, Alan, “Alabama Woman Who Joined ISIS Can’t Return Home, U.S. Says,” *The New York Times*, February 20, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/20/world/middleeast/isis-bride-hoda-muthana.html>,

³⁴ Bell, Stewart, “Exclusive: Extended interview with captured Canadian ISIS Fighter,” *Global News*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gZin02WoG4>

³⁵ Engel, Richard, Plessner, Ben, Connor, Tracy, “American ISIS Defector: ‘I’ve Let My Nation Down,’” *NBC News*, Retrieved 10/9/19, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-uncovered/american-isis-defector-i-ve-let-my-nation-down-n578216>

The other participants were not asked or did not offer a specific answer to this question.

7. When did your sympathy for ISIS begin to take form?

Mo: As an Ivy League dropout currently driving a taxi, he was dissatisfied with his current position in life. His frustration was further exacerbated following the death of his close sister, at which point he began “looking for answers.” Upon watching the movie “Submission” in a college class, he viewed the film as not “purely offensive, but a desecration.” Stating that he was not yet “intellectually equipped to properly criticize” the film, he turned to the internet in search of answers regarding his faith. After thousands of hours of online research into jihadism, he eventually idealized the “vision of a pure Islamic state without geographic boundaries.”³⁶

Muthana: Initially inspired by Twitter and other social media posts made by jihadists, she claims that her fascination in jihadism evolved quickly: “Life was so bland without it. Life has much more meaning when you know why you’re here.”³⁷

Polman: Converted to Islam in her thirties, and was later radicalized online (especially via Facebook).³⁸

³⁶ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Alexander, Hughes, Seamus, Clifford, Bennett, “American Jihadists in Syria and Iraq,” *Program on Extremism: The George Washington University*, February, 2018, pp. 55-62, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/TravelersAmericanJihadistsinSyriaandIraq.pdf>

³⁷ “Young American mom who married ISIS fighter begs to return to U.S.,” Interview with *ABC News*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVH7sTfe8u0>

³⁸ Callimachi, Rukmini, Yuhas, Alan, “Alabama Woman Who Joined ISIS Can’t Return Home, U.S. Says,” *The New York Times*, February 20, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/20/world/middleeast/isis-bride-hoda-muthana.html>

Clark: Claims that his sympathy began as mere curiosity: ““I wanted to go see exactly what the group was about, and what they were doing...I wanted to learn more about the ideology. I'm a political science major, global business minor. I like politics. I like travel, world events. That's what I wanted to do.” His sympathy eventually evolved into radicalization when he became enamored with “killing the enemies of Islam.” He became convinced that martyrdom would guarantee his future in “paradise.” ³⁹

The other participants were not asked or did not offer a specific answer to this question.

ISIS Recruitment

8. Who or what do you believe initially had the greatest influence on your inclination to support the group?

Mo: Asserts that “his main source of learning was online.” The more contact he had with jihadists online, the more he believed that ISIS would represent an “Islamic utopia.” However, he claims that “radicalization cannot be explained by any single moment or root cause,” but is instead an elongated process. With that being said, he does identify jihadist leaders with a strong online presence, such as Anwar al-Awlaki, as principal influencers: “I became more interested in groups out there that were defending Muslims and also living in a place where Islam was being properly implemented.” He

³⁹ Begley, Dug, “Prosecutors allege Sugar Land man linked to 'jihadist fan club,’” *Chron*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Sugar-Land-man-accused-of-joining-Islamic-State-13575412.php>

concluded that, “some Muslims are fine living here (in the U.S.), and find ways to live a proper Islamic life, but at that time I was not one of them.”^{40 41}

Polman: Wanted to pursue a career in nursing and was soon informed that her desired profession could be realized in the jihadist caliphate.⁴²

Muthana: In reference to her strict upbringing, she states that, “you want to go out with your friends and I didn’t get any of that. I turned to my religion and went in too hard. I was self-taught and thought whatever I read, it was right...We were basically in the time of ignorance...and then became jihadi, if you like to describe it that way. I thought I was doing things correctly for the sake of God.”⁴³

Clark: As a former English teacher, Clark claims that he endeavored to teach the language to ISIS recruits: “I have always loved teaching others and learning from others as well...I was in living in Mosul at the time, and I needed a way to support myself.”⁴⁴

Ali: Appears to offer the most political rationale for his decision: “ISIS was the best group, they were going a lot against Assad and liberating areas from

⁴⁰ Engel, Richard, Plesser, Ben, Connor, Tracy, “American ISIS Defector: ‘I’ve Let My Nation Down,’ *NBC News*, Retrieved 10/9/19, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-uncovered/american-isis-defector-i-ve-let-my-nation-down-n578216>

⁴¹ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Alexander, Hughes, Seamus, Clifford, Bennett, “American Jihadists in Syria and Iraq,” *Program on Extremism: The George Washington University*, February, 2018, pp. 55-62, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/TravelersAmericanJihadistsinSyriaandIraq.pdf>

⁴² Callimachi, Rukmini, Yuhas, Alan, “Alabama Woman Who Joined ISIS Can’t Return Home, U.S. Says,” *The New York Times*, February 20, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/20/world/middleeast/isis-bride-hoda-muthana.html>,

⁴³ Chulov, Martin, McKernan, Bethan, “Hoda Muthana ‘deeply regrets’ joining ISIS and wants to return home,” *The Guardian*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/17/us-woman-hoda-muthana-deeply-regrets-joining-isis-and-wants-return-home>

⁴⁴ Engel, Richard, “American ISIS member Warren Clark says he wanted to see ‘what the group was about,’” *NBC News*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/american-isis-member-detained-syria-says-he-wanted-go-see-n958711>

him. Things were pretty good for the Syrian people, there was no corruption. People were happy with ISIS. All the foreigners were going there, and so were the Syrians.”⁴⁵

9. When did you officially commit to becoming a member of ISIS?

Mo: Through a jihadist account on Twitter, Mo arranged his travel plans to Syria. He officially became a member of ISIS once arriving in Syria and meeting with members of the organization.⁴⁶

Muthana: Arranged a flight to Turkey through social media communication with an online jihadist account.⁴⁷

The other participants were not asked or did not offer a specific answer to this question.

Pledging Allegiance to ISIS

10. Was there a point at which your allegiance to ISIS reached a climax?

Ali: “During my basic training and religious classes. Praying, purification, things like that.”⁴⁸

The other participants were not asked or did not offer a specific answer to this question.

⁴⁵ Bell, Stewart, “Exclusive: Extended interview with captured Canadian ISIS Fighter,” *Global News*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gZin02WoG4>

⁴⁶ Engel, Richard, Plessner, Ben, Connor, Tracy, “American ISIS Defector: ‘I’ve Let My Nation Down,’” *NBC News*, Retrieved 10/9/19, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-uncovered/american-isis-defector-i-ve-let-my-nation-down-n578216>

⁴⁷ Callimachi, Rukmini, Yuhas, Alan, “Alabama Woman Who Joined ISIS Can’t Return Home, U.S. Says,” *The New York Times*, February 20, 2019,

⁴⁸ Bell, Stewart, “Exclusive: Extended interview with captured Canadian ISIS Fighter,” *Global News*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gZin02WoG4>

Denouncing Membership to ISIS

11. When did you begin to “second guess” your pledge to join ISIS?

Mo: After witnessing the “bloodthirst” of battle and executions, Mo began experiencing misgivings. As time passed, he was further subjected to the cruelty of sharia law inflicted upon both members and innocent civilians. Mo particularly recalls an instance in which an ISIS leader discussed his ambitions to obtain a “slave girl.” He states that it was just “not the Islam I grew up with.” During his formal instruction, his fellow recruits became enthralled with a suicide belt being showcased by a suicide bomber instructor. In his words, “people were gravitating toward it, touching it like it’s an exhibit, while I was backing away slowly.” He witnessed innocent townspeople being beaten, arrested, and even killed. In one instance, he saw “severed heads placed on spiked poles,” in which the assailants had “madness in their eyes.” Mo claims that “the people had a readiness for violence” and that “it was just “not the Islam I grew up with.”^{49 50}

Muthana: Although she immediately began doubting her decision upon witnessing the conditions of the camps, her successive forced marriages proved especially disillusioning. She states that “we starved and we literally ate grass.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ Englel, Richard, Plessner, Ben, Connor, Tracy, “American ISIS Defector: ‘I’ve Let My Nation Down,’” *NBC News*, Retrieved 10/9/19, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-uncovered/american-isis-defector-i-ve-let-my-nation-down-n578216>

⁵⁰ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Alexander, Hughes, Seamus, Clifford, Bennett, “American Jihadists in Syria and Iraq,” *Program on Extremism: The George Washington University*, February, 2018, pp. 55-62, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/TravelersAmericanJihadistsinSyriaandIraq.pdf>

⁵¹ Callimachi, Rukmini, Yuhas, Alan, “Alabama Woman Who Joined ISIS Can’t Return Home, U.S. Says,” *The New York Times*, February 20, 2019,

Clark: Unlike the previous defectors who list the relentless viciousness of ISIS as a motivation for their escape, Clark alleges that he was not bothered by the brutality: “I think with the beheadings, that’s execution. I’m from the United States, from Texas. They like to execute people, too. So I really don’t see any difference. They might do it off camera, but it’s the same.”⁵²

Ali: Again, unlike his fellow Western defectors, Ali proposes the most politically oriented reason for doubting his membership: “There was loads of problems, but the most basic thing is that they betrayed the Syrian people and the foreigners that came here. They stopped their fight against Assad and trying to free Syria.” He proposes that “killing innocent civilians did not help anyone’s cause. It didn’t help ISIS, didn’t help Syrians. No one. I’m not sure how they still justify killing civilians...targeting them.”⁵³

Sarfo: Supplied the bluntest answer: “After one week.” He witnessed children being beaten, homosexuals being killed, and even a beheading in his first few days in the caliphate. He states that, “you feel it in yourself, there’s nothing holy about this.”⁵⁴

⁵² Engel, Richard, “American ISIS member Warren Clark says he wanted to see ‘what the group was about,’” *NBC News*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/american-isis-member-detained-syria-says-he-wanted-go-see-n958711>

⁵³ Bell, Stewart, “Exclusive: Extended interview with captured Canadian ISIS Fighter,” *Global News*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gZin02WoG4>

⁵⁴ Glazer, Andrew, Callimachi, Rukmini, Laffin, Ben, “Exporting Terror: The ISIS Conflict,” *The New York Times*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7z4GmrrPOW4>

12. What ultimately led to your decision to denounce your membership to ISIS?

Mo: States that, “when I saw how impossible my situation was, I felt urgently unsafe.”⁵⁵

Muthana: Suffering from anemia due to an iron deficiency, Muthana was then impregnated by her husband from an arranged marriage. Ill, pregnant, and bedridden, she asserts that she became homesick and wondered, “what am I doing?”⁵⁶

Polman: After witnessing unspeakable horrors (she offers sparse detail), she attempted to escape but was quickly captured and imprisoned. During her imprisonment, she was raped. Upon her release, she was warned that a second attempted escape would result in her death.⁵⁷

Ali: In addition to his disgust at “betrayal,” Ali recounts that, “the conditions for the foreigners are not good at all. They are getting picked up, jailed, tortured, killed, etc. for bogus charges.” He says that ISIS fears that “the foreign fighters have had enough and that they are going to revolt...there are still a few thousand there.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Engle, Richard, Plessner, Ben, Connor, Tracy, “American ISIS Defector: ‘I’ve Let My Nation Down,’” *NBC News*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-uncovered/american-isis-defector-i-ve-let-my-nation-down-n578216>

⁵⁶ “Young American mom who married ISIS fighter begs to return to U.S.,” Interview with *ABC News*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVH7sTfe8u0>

⁵⁷ Callimachi, Rukmini, Yuhas, Alan, “Alabama Woman Who Joined ISIS Can’t Return Home, U.S. Says,” *The New York Times*, February 20, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/20/world/middleeast/isis-bride-hoda-muthana.html>,

⁵⁸ Bell, Stewart, “Exclusive: Extended interview with captured Canadian ISIS Fighter,” *Global News*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gZin02WoG4>

Sarfo: After witnessing the execution of two innocent civilians, Sarfo states that he began “weighing other options” and planning his escape.⁵⁹

13. Did anyone make an attempt to either encourage or dissuade your desire to denounce your membership?

Mo: He professes that even if the other recruits were disillusioned with ISIS, they dared not communicate their misgivings. Merely expressing a desire to leave is “punishable by death.”⁶⁰

The other participants were not asked or did not offer a specific answer to this question.

14. Right now, do you believe that your decision to join ISIS was the correct one? Why or why not?

Mo: It was “the worst decision I’ve ever made in my life.”⁶¹

Muthana: “I can’t believe it. I ruined my life. I ruined my future... I deeply regret it.”⁶²

Polman: “I don’t have words for how much regret I have.”⁶³

Clark: Claims that he has no regrets and that his curiosity was satisfied.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Glazer, Andrew, Callimachi, Rukmini, Laffin, Ben, “Exporting Terror: The ISIS Conflict,” *The New York Times*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7z4GmrrPOW4>

⁶⁰ Engle, Richard, Plessner, Ben, Connor, Tracy, “American ISIS Defector: ‘I’ve Let My Nation Down,’” *NBC News*, Retrieved 10/9/19, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-uncovered/american-isis-defector-i-ve-let-my-nation-down-n578216>

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Chulov, Martin, McKernan, Bethan, “Hoda Muthana ‘deeply regrets’ joining ISIS and wants to return home,” *The Guardian*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/17/us-woman-hoda-muthana-deeply-regrets-joining-isis-and-wants-return-home>

⁶³ Callimachi, Rukmini, Yuhas, Alan, “Alabama Woman Who Joined ISIS Can’t Return Home, U.S. Says,” *The New York Times*, February 20, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/20/world/middleeast/isis-bride-hoda-muthana.html>,

⁶⁴ Engel, Richard, “American ISIS member Warren Clark says he wanted to see ‘what the group was about,’” *NBC News*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/american-isis-member-detained-syria-says-he-wanted-go-see-n958711>

Ali: “My views are definitely not the same now as they were then...I’ve learned a lot of things. 2014 was a long time ago, a different time. Killing those civilians is not ever justified. It doesn’t help anyone’s cause.”⁶⁵

Sarfo: No.⁶⁶

The Aftermath and Lessons Learned

15. Is there anything that you would like to say to other Americans who might consider joining ISIS?

Mo: Mo is currently working with the FBI to conduct a “counter-narrative” campaign aimed at deterring future sympathizers from becoming recruits. He states that, “I want to be the voice that helps deter extremism and really attack false ideology at its core.”⁶⁷

Muthana: “I was really young and ignorant and I was 19 when I decided to leave...I didn’t appreciate or maybe even really understand how important the freedoms that we have in America are. Now I do.”⁶⁸

Sarfo: German authorities now hope that Sarfo can serve as a voice of deterrence for other Europeans considering joining the ranks of ISIS.⁶⁹

The other participants were not asked or did not offer a specific answer to this question.

⁶⁵ Bell, Stewart, “Exclusive: Extended interview with captured Canadian ISIS Fighter,” *Global News*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gZin02WoG4>

⁶⁶ Glazer, Andrew, Callimachi, Rukmini, Laffin, Ben, “Exporting Terror: The ISIS Conflict,” *The New York Times*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7z4GmrrPOW4>

⁶⁷ Engle, Richard, Plessner, Ben, Connor, Tracy, “American ISIS Defector: ‘I’ve Let My Nation Down,’” *NBC News*, Retrieved 10/9/19, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-uncovered/american-isis-defector-i-ve-let-my-nation-down-n578216>

⁶⁸ “Young American mom who married ISIS fighter begs to return to U.S.,” Interview with *ABC News*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVH7sTfe8u0>

⁶⁹ Glazer, Andrew, Callimachi, Rukmini, Laffin, Ben, “Exporting Terror: The ISIS Conflict,” *The New York Times*, Retrieved October 9, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7z4GmrrPOW4>

Discussion

Correspondence with the Literature

Although the data revealed some marked exceptions, the responses provided in the interviews generally corresponded well with the prior literature and underscored many expected themes. As noted in the prior literature, the age, gender, ethnicity, and geographic demographics of the defectors were predictably diverse. However, contrary to the research, all the participants appeared to have obtained at least some college education, and even suggested that their class instruction eventually guided them towards jihadist research. Additionally, while the interviews did not reveal precise socioeconomic status, the job descriptions of each subject suggests middle-class status.

In accordance with prior research, all of the participants acknowledged the internet, and specifically social media as integral to their radicalization and recruitment process. Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube were all named as direct sources of information and indoctrination. Interestingly, the dark web – which scholars identified as the mainstream medium for jihadist recruitment communication – was rarely, if at all mentioned by the defectors. However, this may be due to the confined nature of these interviews, and thus this study cannot confirm that the dark web did not play a role in the defectors' radicalization.

This potential departure from the prior literature likewise extends to Dr. Borum's previously discussed "four observable stages" of terrorist sympathy. While some of the participants claimed an initial "undesirable event or condition" that inspired them towards jihadist sympathy, many appeared to fall short of meeting

such criteria. Muthana, for example, acknowledged the “blandness” of her home life and strict upbringing as motivation for seeking meaning and adventure. While her life may not have been exceptionally desirable, it does not appear unsavory to the point of radicalization. On the other hand, her experience may help prove Dr. Borum’s theory in that even seemingly mundane objections to life can result in the pursuit of the unthinkable.

Some of the responses given by other defectors also offer a seemingly inconsistent correspondence with prior research. While Mo and Ali identify legitimate political grievances, Polman asserted ISIS’ ability to fulfill her career aspirations as sufficient enticement to join. To be fair, Dr. Borum recognizes that there is “no universal method” for evaluating the progression of extremism. This study further demonstrates that humans are, unlike raw data points, unpredictable products of sometimes enigmatic judgment. Devoid of actual interviews with defectors, no scholar could predict that a “normal” Western citizen would join ISIS as a way to appease career desires. Upon further comparison, though, it does seem that the prior research did account for Polman’s pull towards jihadism, if just vaguely.

An aspect of the literature that was impressively realized among the defectors was immersion in the ISIS “brand” and classification as at least one type of “seeker:” Mo could be categorized as an “ideology” or “revenge” seeker, Muthana as either an “identity” or “thrill” seeker, Polman as a “responsibility” seeker (this does fit her belief that ISIS could satisfy her career wants), Clark as an “ideology,” “death,”

or “redemption” seeker, Ali as a “justice” seeker, and Sarfo as an “ideology” or “justice” seeker.

The disillusionment and defection of the participants in this study strongly correspond with the prior research, especially that conducted by Speckhard and Yayla. With the exception of Clark, all the defectors echoed the “mismatch between the words and deeds of IS” as a primary motivation for escape. Many of the afflictions established in Speckhard and Yayla’s study were also diagnosed in this study (from slave girls to imprisonment). Brutal abuse of their own members, unadulterated violence and other horrors, and “betrayal” (in Ali’s words) of its own political agenda left these recruits not only uninspired, but scared and disgusted with the ISIS leadership.

In fact, most of the defectors averred that the hypocrisy of ISIS leaders supplies the best counter-narrative to jihadist recruitment, in addition to the unfathomable personal hardships faced by members. Interestingly though, in a divergence from the literature, the “confused state of true believers” did not really manifest itself in the defectors in this study. Again with the exception of Clark, none of the subjects claimed to still harbor allegiance to the basic teachings of jihadism.

Implications of the Study

Determining whether the themes in this study either confirm or contradict both the expected outcomes and prior research will not threaten the value of this research, but rather cement its contribution to the literature. As previously discussed, there were indeed multiple revelations discovered in the interviews that may question the prior literature (or, more likely, the legitimacy of this study).

While many of these discrepancies may well be explained by the small sample size and limited scope of inquiry, they are nonetheless worth noting. From the beginning, neither the dark web nor more clustered factions of society (such as Mosques) were mentioned as breeding grounds for jihadist sympathy. Furthermore, the “undesirable event or condition” that purportedly encourages radicalization was either lacking or just vaguely apparent for many of the interviewed defectors.

That being said, the degree to which the responses of the defectors conformed with the prior literature was extraordinary. As the above discussion illustrates, the diverse demographics of members, web-based means of recruitment, progression from sympathy to radicalization, varying forms of enticement, classification of recruits, and motives underlying their eventual disenchantment and defection are all expertly predicted by the literature.

Considering that the hypothesis was largely predicated on the prior literature, it would initially appear that the data confirmed the hypothesis in light of the consistency between the literature and the responses. The hypothesis theorized that this research would unearth why and how recruits joined ISIS, how their membership could have been prevented, lessons for future sympathizers, guidance for future counter-terrorism personnel, and instruction regarding how to recognize peers that are in danger of radicalization.

Ultimately, the data adequately revealed the catalysts for jihadist membership and offered clear lessons for future sympathizers, but only provides general guidance to counter-recruitment authorities and the public at large. The fact

that the hypothesis was thus only partially confirmed signifies the need for greater research of Western defectors (discussed later in the conclusion).

Flaws in the Study

Due in part to the unorthodox nature of the research methodology, this study was subject to a number of flaws. Most obvious, the responses offered by each defector are not direct answers to the questions listed in the protocol. In reality, many of the defectors did not even “answer” the most important questions. Again, this study relied upon interviews conducted by other parties – the possibility that the author of this research selectively chose responses that best answered the questions in the protocol is thus a genuine possibility. Although this research attempted to present the interviews objectively, the fact that defectors may have provided different responses if asked the questions according to the exact verbiage in the protocol moreover jeopardizes the legitimacy of the data.

Even if the selected responses present authentic data, the sample size was noticeably small. Western recruits who are currently fighting for ISIS are of course unable to be interviewed, and those who have returned to their home countries are either being prosecuted or are currently imprisoned. With that in mind, the six individuals in this study were the maximum number of participants that were identified as both credible and capable of providing substantive insight.

Unfortunately, even the credibility of these subjects must be questioned. Each of the interviewed defectors are either facing criminal charges or are awaiting their country’s approval to return. They are hence likely to be aware of the impact of their responses upon their own destiny, and may have tailored their answers to fit a

certain narrative that will assist them in future legal proceedings. For example, while this research did expect defectors to regret their ISIS membership, any expressed remorse would undoubtedly prove advantageous in potential criminal trials. It is hence necessary to recognize that some responses may be strategically calculated rather than genuinely reflective of the defectors' opinions.

Conclusion

Hopefully, this study has demonstrated the potential for future research to unearth recruitment schemes targeting Western recruits, lessons for would-be ISIS members, and strategies to dissuade future radicalization. Perhaps as a basic roadmap, the lessons derived from this study can be magnified by supplemental research incorporating a greater number of defectors. While recognizing the incredible difficulty of contacting dependable and willing defectors, a well founded study, and maybe even accompanied by defectors themselves, could legitimize the results of this research. Moreover, it could investigate many of the questions left unanswered in this protocol.

Due to the limited resources of this study, questioning of defectors was confined to third-party sources, and did not represent direct responses to each inquiry. While enlightening, the interviews included in this study prioritized "what life was like" in ISIS rather than uncovering explicit recruitment techniques, prevention methods, and lessons for the greater public. Direct questions such as "how do you think you could have been prevented from joining ISIS," "how should the American government view ISIS marketing," "how can Westerners recognize

when their family members or peers are being recruited by ISIS,” etc. would prove far more instructional than the data accrued in this research. The ability to follow defectors’ responses with probing questions would additionally allow for a greater excavation of a recruit’s mindset.

At the risk of appearing overoptimistic, this research can inspire current defectors to reach out and participate in any future studies that emerge from this research. As a whole, this study can hopefully function as a playbook for counterterrorism authorities, Westerners susceptible to jihadist marketing, and Western society at large in the war to defeat ISIS recruitment and protect the homeland and its most vulnerable citizens.

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Curriculum Vitae

Education

Johns Hopkins University

Candidate for a Master of Arts in Global Security Studies

GPA: 3.84

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Washington D.C.

University of Georgia

Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice, Minor in Italian

GPA: 3.72, *Magna Cum Laude* (Major GPA: 3.96)

August, 2017

Athens, GA

Affiliations

President, UGA Criminal Justice Society

2013 - 2017

- Organized speaking events, recruited new members, hosted alumni panels, planned community service events, organized field trips, oversaw fundraising drives, and helped organize graduation ceremonies.

Criminal Justice Honor Society (Alpha Phi Sigma)

2016 – 2017

Outdoors Without Limits

2014 – 2017

- Helped disabled veterans pursue their outdoor passions and raised money for veteran causes.

Habitat for Humanity

2013 – 2015

- Fundraised for events and assisted in building homes for families in need.

Professional Experience

Marine Corps Officer Candidate School

01/2018 – 01/2018

- Officer Candidate: Attended Officer Candidate School in Quantico, VA. Contracted cellulitis and was involuntarily medically dropped.

Office of Congressman Jody Hice

09/2017 –

12/2017

- Intern: responsibilities included assisting local constituents with case work, conducting research to resolve constituent complaints, and responding to constituent mail, emails and phone calls.

U.S. Marshals Southeast Regional Fugitive Task Force

05/2017 – 08/2017

- Intern: responsibilities included assisting U.S. Marshals in apprehending fugitives, conducting investigations, roleplaying in simulation exercises, documenting arrests, cleaning and maintaining weaponry and other duties.

Office of Congressman Seth Moulton

05/2016 –

07/2016

- Intern: responsibilities included responding to constituent emails and phone calls, organizing mail, managing the front desk and entertaining guests in the D.C. office.

Whiskey Bent, Bartender

12/ 2015 – 12/2017

Honors and Awards

UGA "Classic Scholars" award recipient

- Four Year merit-based academic scholarship of \$10,000 annually

UGA Dean's List (Semester GPA of 3.5 or above)

Additional Skills

Italian: Ability to speak, write and read at a conversational level.

Researcher: Conducted research on equal opportunity employment cases for Dr. Christina L. Boyd.

- Research was conducted for academic study comparing employment discrimination cases.